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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to provide assistance in handling complex situational conflicts involving diversity through appropriate conflict management strategies for diverse classrooms at the elementary and middle school levels. Diversity-based conflict is not new in the United States. The classroom is, as it has been historically, one of the major arenas for socialization. In addition to the traditional "three R's," students need to master the "R" of relationships, and teachers must help them accept diversity and learn to resolve conflict. Conflicts can be positive if they result in increased communication and understanding. Teacher communication with children is a critical element in promoting cultural harmony in any classroom. Teachers must also recognize their own cultural biases when communicating with students. They should try to model affirmation, appreciation, and acceptance for their students to create a supportive learning environment. The Peace Maintenance System described by L. Quigley and M. Zakierski (1997) and based on the Children's Creative Response to Conflict program (P. Prutzman, 1977) is an approach that enables students and teachers to create an environment in which mutual respect is paramount. Peer mediation is another approach by which conflict resolution is encouraged can be encouraged in the schools. (Contains 20 references.) (SLD)

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Managing Diversity-Based Conflicts Among Children

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Introduction

The "melting pot" metaphor has gone out of fashion in the United States. But the promises of liberty, equality, and acceptance for the myriad peoples who inhabit this nation still are unfulfilled. In many classrooms, rapidly changing demographics have forced diverse groups of students to interact, often resulting in conflict and even violence.

Thus the need to "manage" diversity still exists. American schools must decrease conflict and affirm diversity within their classrooms. The classroom is a microcosm of society, and it is there that ethnic and cultural bias must be eradicated and an appreciation for cultural differences must be promoted.

This fastback is designed to provide assistance in handling these complex situational conflicts through appropriate conflict management strategies designed for diverse classrooms at the elementary and middle school levels. The following sections will review the history of diversity-based conflicts and the changing demographics of America, discuss diversity on a human and personal level, offer strategies for conflict manage-

ment, and extend these strategies to include ways of establishing a supportive multicultural climate throughout the entire school and its larger community.

Diversity-Based Conflict

This century's conflicts among ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, and racial groups form the framework for the study of violence in American society. From the Spanish American War to international aggressions in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Israel, and Iraq to civil wars in Cambodia, Bosnia, Ireland, and Rwanda (to name a few), the past hundred years have been fraught with more and greater turbulence than this world has ever known. These lessons must be remembered as we try to eliminate the effects of this intolerance in our own communities and schools.

We are, as John F. Kennedy wrote, *A Nation of Immigrants*. Since the English colonists settled in Virginia in 1607, there have been numerous waves of immigration in the United States, though not all immigrants came willingly. The first slave ships from Africa began to trade with America in 1619, and English convicts and debtors frequently had their sentences commuted to indentured servitude in the colonies. In the mid-1800s, many Irish fled the potato famine and came to the United States.

Other northern Europeans, including the Scots, Welsh, Swedes, Finns, and Germans, traveled to America in search of political and religious freedom and an economically better way of life. In the latter part of the 19th century, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and from China, Japan, and the Philippines came in search of this golden promise. Documents from these periods demonstrate clearly that these new Americans were not welcomed by the local populace, who, almost as a matter of course, dubbed them "dirty, ignorant . . . with low morals" (Woodham-Smith 1962, p. 257).

Through much of the 19th and 20th centuries, U.S. immigration policy mirrored the bitter political, religious, and racial conflicts around the world. In 1882, the first federal immigration law barred lunatics, idiots, convicts, and those likely to become public charges. During this same year, the Chinese Exclusion Act suspended new immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years; the law was renewed repeatedly until its repeal in 1943. In 1891, Congress added health qualifications to immigration restrictions. From 1907 to 1924, the "Gentleman's Agreement" between the United States and Japan halted the immigration of Japanese workers. In 1917, a literacy test for immigrants was passed over the veto of President Woodrow Wilson.

The first Quota Act (1921) limited the yearly number of immigrants from any country to the percent of the number of persons of that nationality living in the United States in 1910. This clearly discriminatory legislation was made even more stringent in 1924, when it reduced the quota to 2% and changed the base year to 1890. The

National Origins Act of 1929 changed the base year to 1920 and set an annual total of 150,000 immigrants. It also prohibited immigration from Asia. By 1954, Ellis Island — the symbol of mass migration — was closed.

It was not until 1965 that Congress amended some of these discriminatory practices. A preference system of immigration was adopted, which gave priority to refugees and people with certain skills. In 1978, the separate ceilings of the Quota Acts were abolished in favor of a worldwide annual total of 290,000 immigrants. Spouses and children of U.S. citizens were not counted as part of the total.

Over the past two decades, Mexico has been the country of origin for the majority of U.S. immigrants. The Philippines, China, Korea, and Vietnam follow closely behind. There also has been a 178% increase in the number of Irish who have come to America. The number of immigrants from Iran, Haiti, Poland, and Romania has doubled, while the number fleeing El Salvador is six times that of the previous decade (Garcia 1994).

In 1985, white students constituted 71% of the public school population; in 1995 that proportion had decreased to 66%. It is projected that by 2026, white students will constitute only 30% of the total student population. In addition, 25% of the public school population in 2026, or 15 million students, will have only limited proficiency in English. Fairly soon, it will be impossible for any educator to serve in a public school in which the students are not racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse (Garcia 1994).

Armed with this information about U.S. immigration patterns, two questions arise:

- How does the conflict-ridden history of American immigration, as well as this century's diversity-based conflicts throughout the world, affect our communities and classrooms?
- How will immigration and diversity-based conflicts affect our ability to educate the newest Americans in the 21st century?

The classroom is one of the major arenas for socialization. Thus educators not only must accept and appreciate differences, they must model these beliefs on a daily basis and use them to resolve the conflicts that inevitably occur within the school community. Only then will educators be able to teach students to cooperate in this new, global, multicultural, and multilingual America.

Likenesses and Differences

Traditionally, children went to school to master the Three R's. As we approach the 21st century, they will need to become proficient in another R, Relationships. It is fairly easy for students to relate to people who look like them and have the same values as they do. But relating to other people becomes more difficult as the differences between people increase. If educators are to help students deal with these differences, one place to begin is to help them understand the concept of sameness.

Teachers can use the Japanese art of origami to illustrate this concept. This simple, hands-on demonstration works as well with older students as with younger ones. Following are the steps to take:

1. Distribute to each student an identical brightly colored sheet of paper. Each sheet should be the same size and the same color.
2. Have the students confirm that all of their sheets are alike.
3. Instruct the students to modify their own pieces of paper in any manner they choose (folding, cutting, writing, etc.).

4. At the end of five minutes, compare the students' creations.

The students should note that their final products show great diversity. Emphasize that although all pieces were originally the same, each student's choice of how to change his or her paper resulted in many different pieces of art. Then point out that these differences are more interesting and unique than the original plain paper. Finally, ask students to apply their new insights to other students in the class, comparing such differences as their ages and grades and discussing how they still have elements of sameness.

Another way to approach this topic is to ask students to work with a buddy or partner to discover how they are both alike and different. A "Buddy Questionnaire" can guide this joint exploration. Some possible questions include:

- How are you both alike?
- How are you different?
- What are your three favorite foods?
- What do you like to do after school?
- What makes you happy?
- What do you like best about yourself?
- What do you look for in a friend?

The respect for differences and for the rights of other students should be extended beyond the classroom into the larger school community. One method for enabling students to extend their insights is to have them brainstorm the ways students should treat each other in the

lunchroom, auditorium, and schoolyard. Using these student-generated guidelines, students then create slogans and posters to support the rights of each person in the school community. Displaying these posters throughout the school will bring the message to other students, faculty, administrators, and parents.

Research projects are a teaching staple in most secondary schools, but they also can be used to teach tolerance and to resolve conflicts among even the youngest learners. Historical scenes that include the theme of tolerance can be re-enacted by children in the classroom or with other classes and grades. A study of Martin Luther King Jr. or Mahatma Ghandi are two possibilities.

Alan Singer writes, "A key precept for multicultural education should be respect for the richness of difference" (1994, p. 287). Teaching students to recognize likenesses and respect differences is crucial for the survival and growth of our diverse American society.

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Conflict Resolution

A conflict can occur whenever there is a clash of ideas, views, personalities, political orientations, economic systems, and so forth. In addition to the parties directly engaged in the disagreement, the conflict also can involve one or more witnesses. Conflicts and conflict resolution are a part of our daily existence.

Conflicts need not be negative; they may be positive if they result in increased communication and understanding. Productive conflicts enhance interactions by stimulating interest and curiosity. They also help people to air their problems and arrive at solutions (Deutsch 1973).

For example, the scenario that follows can be solved in a handful of ways. Each solution has a different consequence. Two of the solutions can result in greater understanding and communication between the parties to the conflict.

Conflict Scenario

Your neighbor's dog barks at every sound he hears. The last two nights he has barked until very late, preventing you and your family from getting to sleep. What strategies could you use to resolve this conflict?

Personal Appeal: You call on the neighbor in an effort to reach a viable solution.

Consequence: The neighbor might be understanding and place the dog in another part of the house during the evening hours. Thus the neighbors still remain friendly.

Litigation: You call the police to issue a summons for a violation of the town's noise ordinance.

Consequence: The neighbor becomes hostile and the ill feelings increase between neighbors.

Third Party Mediation: You enlist the assistance of an impartial third party to help resolve the dispute.

Consequence: The mediator promotes more effective communication between you and your neighbor. A solution can be reached that is acceptable to both.

Avoidance: You simply do not say anything to your neighbor in order to maintain peace with him.

Consequence: The problem does not diminish or go away. You become more annoyed each day.

Confrontation: You harm the dog.

Consequence: Your neighbor begins legal proceedings.

Deutsch (1962) theorized that all conflicts are driven by one or more of three underlying motives: competition, cooperation, and individualism. A competitive motive invokes the wish to do well at another party's expense. Cooperation invokes the motive of sinking or swimming together. The individualist simply tries to do well for himself or herself and ignores other people's objectives. According to Deutsch, most conflicts are characterized by mixtures of these three motives.

Deutsch (1962) also characterized the solutions of conflict into two types: settlement and resolution. Settlement refers to changing only behavior, whereas resolution implies changing both behavior and under-

lying attitudes. The latter is the most difficult solution to achieve in most disputes.

Successful conflict resolution usually entails mutual changes in attitude so that both parties internalize new patterns of interaction. As the disputants' attitudes change, there also are behavioral changes. In the "barking dog" conflict scenario, finding mutually agreeable solutions moves both parties toward a successful resolution.

The tension between people from different cultures often is caused by a lack of understanding and the acceptance of negative stereotypes. Each individual needs to increase his or her own cultural awareness and knowledge. The place to begin is to recognize one's own biases. By reflecting on one's own background and experiences, one can learn to respect the diversity that otherwise leads to conflict. This increased understanding of one's self leads to increased communication with other people.

Communication is very important in managing conflict. It is important to listen actively: to face the person, to give undivided attention, and to not interrupt the speaker, but to ask relevant questions and to restate relevant issues for clarity. One must focus on the issues, not on personalities.

There is a story told in many conflict-management workshops to illustrate the importance of communication:

> Once there were two sisters who had a terrible argument over the last remaining orange. Each sister argued that she desperately needed the orange. Finally the sisters demanded

that their mother settle this issue. If you were their mother, how would you handle this situation?

In a workshop, the suggestions often fit into five categories, which can be thought of as the "Five C's": Cop-out, Cave-in, Confrontation, Compromise, and Collaboration (Scott 1989). Any one of these responses might be appropriate in a given situation; however, collaboration is the style of communication most likely to result in meeting the needs of all individuals involved in the conflict. Using the story above, for example:

1. The mother does nothing. (Cop-out)
2. The mother gives one child the whole orange. (Cave-in)
3. The mother hits both children or allows the children to fight it out. (Confrontation)
4. The mother cuts the orange in half. (Compromise)
5. The mother asks each child, "Why do you want the orange?" (Collaboration)

In the last instance, one girl replies that she wants to drink the juice, and the other answers that she needs the peel to bake a cake. Thus both sisters are able to reach a mutually agreeable solution, because each wants to use a different part of the orange. The other four solutions result in neither girl getting what she needs. If the mother had not communicated with her daughters, the conflict would not have been resolved successfully.

Programs have been started in schools throughout the United States to train students to become peer mediators. During a 15- to 20-hour training program, these students learn about conflict styles and mediation tech-

niques. But most important, they learn communication skills, especially the skill of active listening. When faced with a conflict, the following questions are addressed by the mediators:

- Are both parties willing to listen to each other and to attempt to understand each other's feelings?
- Do both parties respect each other's perspective?
- Are either party's feelings hurt?
- Does the suggested solution make either party angry?
- Have both parties sought alternative solutions?
- Are both parties satisfied with the solution?
- Will both parties agree to implement the solution?

There are many benefits of peer mediation programs. Peer mediators offer a positive alternative to fighting. The mediators are taught nonviolent ways to handle a dispute and to assist those involved in a conflict to negotiate and reach a verbal or written agreement that they can accept. In addition, the disputants learn acceptable ways of solving their problems.

The Teacher as a Communicator

Teacher communication with children is a critical element in promoting cultural harmony in any classroom. The classroom teacher has the formidable task of establishing a supportive climate in which each child feels appreciated, affirmed, and accepted by peers and adults. Care must be exercised so that the content of any communication does not result in demeaning any child. For example, a lesson on foods not only should represent the various ethnic groups within the class but also should include samples of equal nutritional value from the ethnic foods mentioned. In that way, the teacher does not suggest that one group's ethnic dishes are mostly junk foods.

Teachers also must recognize their personal cultural biases when communicating with students. In the above lesson on foods, it would be inappropriate to say, "Anyone who does not eat ham or steak does not know what good food is." A more appropriate statement would be, "I, personally, love ham and steak; but for religious reasons, some people are not allowed to eat those

meats." The latter statement also can be used to elicit questions from students and to lead naturally into lessons on cultural differences and acceptance.

In addition to the words and phrases the teacher uses, the teacher also must be aware of such factors as the emotional tone and pitch of the voice. A voice that is high-pitched or fraught with sarcasm and "put downs" will evoke negative responses from the children. A calm, warm, and understanding voice most likely will evoke a positive student response.

Teachers also must ensure that their body language is congruent with their spoken message. Students will be quick to reject a teacher who talks about "tolerance" and "acceptance of differences" but who recoils physically when one of her first-grade students tries to hug her.

In multicultural settings, there are many impediments to communication. These impediments go beyond the varying abilities in the English language that may be evident in classrooms with many immigrant students. There also are cultural impediments to communication about which teachers should be aware. For example, many Asian children are taught that it is disrespectful to look an adult directly in the eyes, particularly if the adult is someone in a position of authority, such as a parent, teacher, or employer. They also are taught not to initiate conversation, and so it may be a problem to get these children to participate freely in classroom discussions.

While good communication skills will help a teacher resolve diversity-based conflicts as they arise, it is better to establish an atmosphere where such conflicts are unlikely to develop. To do that, teachers should help

each student develop a positive self-image. Every opportunity must be provided for the students to feel good about their "roots." That will lead to increased self-confidence, which in turn will decrease the students' need to begin a conflict with someone who is "different" from them.

Elementary and middle school students should be encouraged to write essays about the places from which they or their ancestors emigrated. The students can contact the embassies and consulates of those countries, as well as ethnic organizations in the community, to request free literature, posters, speakers, and other resources. Parents and other members of the community can help plan and conduct cultural presentations in the school. A wall map of the world can be used to create a "Geographic Origins" display. Each of these projects lends itself to multiple lessons on diversity.

In creating a supportive learning environment, teachers must always try to model diversity's "Three A's": *Affirmation*, acknowledging differences; *Appreciation*, valuing differences; and *Acceptance*, welcoming differences (Scott 1989). There are a variety of strategies a teacher can use to promote these Three A's. For example, volunteer "buddies" can show "the ropes" to new arrivals. Usually the volunteer and his or her protégé will learn about each other through the experience. A "One World Day" can be planned by the students, teachers, and parents in a school. The activities could include a food fair, dance festival, video travelogue, parent luncheon, classroom guest lectures, and parent visits to classrooms.

Managing Conflict

When conflicts occur in classrooms, teachers have the responsibility for resolving them. In addition, educators must teach students how to get along with, work with, care for, and help one another (Kohn 1991). To teach these skills successfully, teachers need to be trained in systems of prosocial strategies, including communication, affirmation, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills.

Teachers use different methods to resolve conflicts in different situations, but most of those methods can be categorized as one of the "Five C's" that were previously introduced. Each of these methods will be appropriate in different circumstances, but the goal should be to train the students to settle disputes peacefully. For example, there will be times when it will be part of the training function to let a pair of disputing children try to resolve their own dispute without any interference from the teacher (that is, to *cop out*). Sometimes a teacher will use his or her authority to sway the outcome of a dispute in favor of a "nice" child and against a "bully" (that is, to *cave in* to niceness). In addition, when arguments and fights pose a potential threat to students' safety, teachers may need to enter into face-to-face *con-*

frontations with disruptive students. Most teachers try to teach their students to *compromise* when they are in an argument. For example, the teacher may say, "Since there are six sticks remaining, three will be given to Shani and three to Ashley."

However, as diversity-based conflicts become more frequent in schools, teachers increasingly are forced to be "third party neutrals," that is, mediators and arbitrators. This role involves the *collaborative* approach. In some schools, the role of mediator is not limited to teachers but may extend to the students through peer mediation programs.

Conflict Scenario

Taisha has accused Cynthia of trying to steal her boyfriend. They have been arguing since their fourth-period lunch. Finally, during their eighth-period English class, Cynthia threatens to scratch Taisha's eyes out. The teacher, Mr. Woo, separates the two girls and asks them to see him at the end of the period.

At the end of the period, Mr. Woo's first question to these former friends is, "Why were you arguing to the point of almost coming to a fight?" He requests only one girl to answer at a time without interruption from the other one. He also requests that there be no name calling when describing the reasons for their respective behaviors. After listening to both girls and getting each to focus on the real problem (namely, a philandering boyfriend), the girls agree to restore their friendship and to send the errant boyfriend packing.

Mr. Woo brought about a verbal agreement through collaboration. Each student focused on her real needs and how they could be met so that both would be satisfied. Mr. Woo acted as a mediator.

Teachers in elementary and middle schools also use elements of mediation every time they ask a child, "Why did you hit him?" or "Why did you take his pencil?" However, this is a professional questioning technique that teachers need to develop further. To use mediation effectively, the disputants must be empowered to resolve their own conflict through the intervention of an impartial third party. This skill will become even more critical as school populations become more diverse.

Teachers and administrators need to use strategies that will encourage alternative solutions to violence. Two programs that successfully incorporate the management of conflict are the Peace Maintenance System and peer mediation programs.

The Peace Maintenance System

The Peace Maintenance System (Quigley 1997; Zakierski 1997) is based on the Children's Creative Response to Conflict program (Prutzman 1977). It includes four sets of skills, or domains, that enable students and teachers to create an environment in which mutual respect is paramount. The four domains are: communication, affirmation, cooperation, and conflict resolution. The skills in these domains are used by both teachers and students, thus creating a classroom climate that supports positive teacher-student interactions.

The first domain of the Peace Maintenance System is well-developed and effective communication skills. These skills are necessary to uncover the reasons for a conflict and to determine an appropriate response. Students focus on developing effective speaking skills,

improving listening skills, and increasing awareness of nonverbal communication (Prutzman et al. 1988).

The second set of skills, affirmation, enables students to recognize and appreciate their individual gifts, as well as those of others. To increase this affirmation of self and others, the teacher links a positive self-concept with school achievement by making the curriculum relate to personal meaning, student self-concept, and school climate.

Cooperation, the third domain, is crucial for the cohesiveness of the Peace Maintenance System. Within the classroom environment, cooperative instruction is used to divide the class into small groups of two to five students so that they can work together to maximize their own and others' learning. A positive interdependence among students enables them to perceive that they can reach their learning goals if, and only if, the other students in the learning group also reach their goals (Deutsch 1962; Johnson and Johnson 1995).

The fourth domain, conflict resolution, supports a constructive approach to interpersonal and intergroup conflicts that helps people with opposing positions work together to arrive at mutually acceptable compromises (Deutsch 1987).

These strategies teach students how to communicate effectively, affirm each other consistently, build relationships in a caring and cooperative environment, and manage their behavior and conflict creatively. That is, they create a humane school climate that provides a pleasant and satisfying place for teachers and students to solve conflicts.

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Peer Mediation

Schools throughout the nation have implemented peer mediation programs. Many are modeled on such community mediation models as the San Francisco Community Board Program (1982). These programs are based on the belief that conflict is a natural process, but that people need to be trained to resolve conflicts positively.

In a typical peer mediation program, the student mediators are chosen by their teachers; however, most programs also allow students to volunteer to serve as mediators. The students, along with their teachers, participate in approximately 20 hours of training to learn how to handle a conflict and to communicate effectively with the disputants. After the training, the trained student mediators usually give a demonstration of a typical conflict situation to the entire school population. The demonstration helps the entire student body understand how conflicts will be resolved in the school.

During one such demonstration in a New York elementary school, two fifth-grade students role-played a conflict situation in which one child accuses another child of cheating. The students obviously had experienced this type of conflict in their classroom. After the demonstration, one of the students said: "Before being trained as a mediator, I thought the only thing I could do was to go to my teacher for her decision. Now I feel that by talking it through with Felicia and the mediators, I have many options available to me. I feel like I have more control." It is evident from this child's state-

ment that learning conflict management strategies empowers an individual to find alternative solutions to problems encountered in daily life.

Conclusion

In an increasingly global economy, the links between Americans and other nations and cultures will continue to grow. It is not unusual in the United States to purchase an automobile that was assembled in Mexico with an engine that was manufactured in Japan, and for which the marketing was arranged in the United States using finances managed in Switzerland. In the 21st century, these cultural contacts are expected to increase; and this cultural diversity will be reflected in the nation's schools.

Historically, when one group of people interacts with another, each has both positive and negative effects on the other. Unfortunately, one of the common effects of this interaction is conflict. And in America, this conflict often is played out in the schools.

The schools often are ill-equipped to deal with the children of the new immigrants to America. For many school districts, the presence of "foreign" students has resulted in "culture shock." Often, the racial and ethnic diversity in U.S. schools has exploded into violence.

Several strategies exist for maintaining peace and harmony in schools. Peer mediation and the Peace

Maintenance System are only two. But they all have in common the development of effective communication skills as a way to manage conflict. In addition, by practicing the "Three A's" — affirmation, appreciation, and acceptance — teachers and students can foster greater tolerance and help avoid negative conflicts in both their schools and their communities.

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Two annual series, published each spring and fall, offer fastbacks on a wide range of educational topics. Each fastback is intended to be a focused, authoritative treatment of a topic of current interest to educators and other readers. Several hundred fastbacks have been published since the program began in 1972, many of which are still in print. Among the topics are:

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For a current listing of available fastbacks and other publications of the Educational Foundation, please contact Phi Delta Kappa, 408 N. Union, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789, or (812) 339-1156.

Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation

The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation was established on 13 October 1966 with the signing, by Dr. George H. Reavis, of the irrevocable trust agreement creating the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation Trust.

George H. Reavis (1883-1970) entered the education profession after graduating from Warrensburg Missouri State Teachers College in 1906 and the University of Missouri in 1911. He went on to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Columbia University. Dr. Reavis served as assistant superintendent of schools in Maryland and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1929 he was appointed director of instruction for the Ohio State Department of Education. But it was as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Cincinnati public schools (1939-48) that he rose to national prominence.

Dr. Reavis' dream for the Educational Foundation was to make it possible for seasoned educators to write and publish the wisdom they had acquired over a lifetime of professional activity. He wanted educators and the general public to "better understand (1) the nature of the educative process and (2) the relation of education to human welfare."

The Phi Delta Kappa fastbacks were begun in 1972. These publications, along with monographs and books on a wide range of topics related to education, are the realization of that dream.